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Bulecheck Has Fun With Vida Blue

Tricia Booker

Leslie Bulecheck, of Los Altos Hills, Calif., had doubts about showing in the World Champion Hunter Rider Amateur-Owner Challenge class at the Capital Challenge Horse Show on Thursday Oct. 5. Her horse Vida Blue had a busy week showing in two divisions over four days, and she said, "I was thinking that maybe I shouldn't do it, and then at the last minute I thought that I would do it for fun." But what started out as just having fun turned into a winning round on Thursday afternoon.

"There are some pretty amazing horses in there so just to be in the top 10 is great," said Bulecheck, who scored an 84 to win.

The course was long and forward and was built with a five-stride line set down one side, far out of the corner. Bulecheck knew midway through the course that she and Vida Blue were having a good trip. She said, "As it kept flowing to the end I really felt like I had it. I think it was when I was coming to the last jump I thought, 'Ok, one jump, I can do one jump.' So I just let go and it was there."

One of the trouble spots on the course was finding the distance to the long five-stride line. Many of the riders found themselves "stuck" in the corner cantering away from the in-gate and couldn't find the distance to the line. Bulecheck admitted she had some trouble coming into that line in the second class of the division.

She said, "I kind of got sucked back into the turn and got a little tight to it." Because of that, her main concern in the challenge class was to address that trouble spot.

"I fixed it this time around. I was kind of excited about that and forgot about the rest of the course...which seemed to work out OK," she added laughing.

Earlier in the week, Vida Blue picked up ribbons in the second year green division with John French in the irons and earlier on Thursday Bulecheck collected a reserve championship in the amateur-owner, 18-35, division.

Earning the younger amateur-owner championship as well as the grand amateur-owner title was Bridget Hallman, Oyster Bay, N.Y., and Gray Slipper. It was a repeat performance for the horse and rider combination.

Hallman said of the wins, "It's so exciting to be able to receive these awards twice. It's all just like a fairy tale."

Gray Slipper was ridden earlier in the week by Hallman's trainer, Louise Serio, and collected the regular working championship as well as the grand hunter championship.

Hallman's high scores and multiple blue ribbons put pressure on Rachel Geiger for the WCHR Amateur-Owner National Championship. Coming into Capital Challenge, Geiger, of Malvern, Pa., led the national standings and wore the leading rider armband, but over the three days of competition the two amateurs ran neck-and-neck for the WCHR national championship.

"It's just so cool to know that I was so consistent throughout the year to even be in contention," said Geiger, who added with a smile. "And I was really excited that I got to wear the armband."

Geiger, 21, wasn't aware that the points accrued at Capital Challenge counted toward the national title. When she realized that, Geiger started worrying about holding the lead. But the young

amateur collected enough ribbons in the division to keep her lead and take the honors. When asked how she felt about the rivalry in the race for the title, she said, "It's kind of different with me and Bridget because we're in the same barn. We're kind of a team. I'm thrilled when she wins, and she's thrilled when I win."

Friday's schedule will feature the World Champion Hunter Rider Adult Amateur Finals, which will decide the WCHR Adult Amateur National Championship. Following the WCHR class, the top 30 adult equitation riders in the nation will vie for the championship title in the ARIAT National Adult Medal Finals.